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Contacts: Chris Davidson, chris_davidson@fws.gov, 501/513-4481
Tom Mackenzie, tom_mackenzie@fws.gov, 404/679-7291

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lists Neosho Mucket as Endangered and Rabbitsfoot as Threatened

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is listing the Neosho mucket as endangered and the Rabbitsfoot as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Both species are freshwater mussels found in river systems in the eastern half of the United States.

The Neosho mucket has been eliminated from about 62 percent of its historic range with only nine of 16 historic populations remaining. Only one of these populations is known to be reproducing. The Neosho mucket is currently found in Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri.

The Rabbitsfoot has disappeared from about 64 percent of its historic range. While 51 of the 140 historic populations remain, only 11 populations (22 percent of its existing populations or eight percent of the historic populations) are viable; 23 populations (45 percent of the existing populations) are at risk of elimination; and 17 populations (33 percent of the current populations) show limited reproduction with little evidence of sustainability. The Rabbitsfoot is currently found in Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. The Rabbitsfoot is no longer found in Georgia and West Virginia.

In listing the two mussels, the Service evaluated factors that could lead to their extinction. Threats to these mussels include loss and degradation of stream and river habitat due to impoundments, channelization, chemical contaminants, mining and sedimentation. Freshwater mussels require clean water; their decline often signals a decline in the water quality of the streams and rivers they inhabit.

The Service's final rule listing the Neosho mucket and the Rabbitsfoot appears in the September 17, 2013, *Federal Register*. The protection for these mussel species under the ESA becomes effective 30 days after the rule is published in the *Federal Register*. The ultimate goal of the ESA is the recovery of these listed species, so that they no longer need the protective measures of the ESA. The next step is development of a recovery plan that provides a guidebook for the Service and its conservation partners to address threats to the species survival and recovery. When completed, the recovery plan will be available on the Service's website (<http://www.fws.gov/endangered>)

It is illegal under the ESA to kill, harm or otherwise “take” a listed species, or to possess, import, export or conduct interstate or international commerce without authorization from the Service. The ESA also requires all federal agencies to ensure actions they authorize, fund, or undertake do not jeopardize the existence of listed species.

On October 16, 2012, and May 9, 2013, the Service opened public comment periods on its proposal to list these mussels under the ESA. Twelve comments were received on the proposed rule. The Service did not receive any requests for a public hearing during either comment period. However, we held public information meetings in Joplin, Missouri, on May 21, 2013, and Greenville, Missouri, on May 23, 2013.

For more information regarding the listing of these two freshwater mussels, please contact Chris Davidson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas Ecological Services Field Office, 110 South Amity Road Suite 300, Conway, AR 72302; telephone 501-513-4481; facsimile 501-513-4480. Also, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/arkansas-es/> or Docket #FWS-R4-ES-2012-0031 on <http://www.regulations.gov/>

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